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ABSTRACT

A study compared the effects of retesting (with and without the benefit of short term instruction) on the scores of subjects in an upper-division university who had failed a writing test. Subjects who did not receive a passing score in their first attempt at the essay test were given the opportunity of attending a 4-hour workshop designed to prepare the students for the retest. Results indicated that irrespective of whether or not they participated in the workshop, students had higher mean scores at retest, and students with higher mean scores gained more than students with lower mean scores. Results also indicated that those who took the workshop gained more than those who did not. (One table of data is included.) (RS)

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REATTAINMENT OF WRITING EXPERTISE OF ADULT REENTERING COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Midwest Writing Center's Association
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At an upper-division university, a literate skills test-remediation model was implemented in 1983 (Suddick and Vaccaro, 1983) with the verbal component assessed by the Test of Standard Written English (Educational Testing Service, 1974-1978). The TSWE was superseded by writing sample 1984. The essay was evaluated on five criteria, but a pass-fail score was reported. The evaluation model, with the assistance of Educational Testing Service, was modified in 1988.

The institution opted to evaluate essays on four criteria. These and their denotations are as follows:

A. Focus - The paper must have a controlling idea or topic statement in response to the topic,

B. Organization - The paper must show clear and coherent development of the controlling idea,

C. Elaboration (Support) - The paper must indicate details or reasons to support the controlling idea. Details and reasons should be relevant, clear and adequate in number, and

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D. Conventions (Mechanics) - The paper should be written using correct sentence structure, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, and should avoid primer-style writing.

Each criterion is clearly defined on a six point score: 1 = Seriously inadequate, 2 = Inadequate, 3 = Unsatisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Good, and 6 = Superior. Obviously values of 1 to 3 are not acceptable, but values of 4 to 6 are acceptable.

While four criteria were evaluated, the institution opted to have the evaluators report a total score; i.e., 1 to 6, as a composite. Essays are assigned to trained readers at random and each writing sample is evaluated twice. After the first pair of readings, only pass-fail papers, i.e., values of 1, 2, or 3 versus values of 4, 5, or 6, are reread by two additional readers who are assigned at random. For papers read by four evaluators, the sum of the scores is used to define fail and pass, a composite total of 14 or less versus a total of 15 or higher, respectively.

Students are notified of their meeting or not meeting the expectation of the university. Per policy, students not passing the examination have another attempt to meet the requirement by the testing option before they are required to successfully pass a writing equivalent course. In addition, students prior to retesting have the option of enrolling in a non-credit four-hour;

i.e., 2 hour per two day workshop to prepare students to challenge the examination.

In the first session, the scoring criteria and common mistakes made in essays are presented. Then the students draft an essay using the prior examination prompts. The writing samples are evaluated per the criteria prior to the second meeting. At that time, students are given constructive feedback to improve their writing.

All students who retested did not avail themselves of the non-credit workshop; thus, there was a unique opportunity to compare and contrast the effects of retesting with and without the benefit of short term instruction. The mean retest scores for the treated and control students having a wide range of test scores is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Mean Retest Scores for Treated and Control Students with Varying Original Mean Scores

First Test	Control	Treated
1.0	1.04	1.08
1.5	1.60	1.61
2.0	2.17	2.22
2.5	2.81	2.83
3.0	3.39	3.45
3.5	4.03	4.18

Several trends were evident. Irrespective of treatment or control status, students had higher means at retest and students with higher means gained more than students with lower scores. Lastly, those in the treatment group gained more than those in the control group.

References

Suddick, D. E. and Vaccaro, J.B. (1983, April). Development of a literate skills testing program for older, adult re-entry college students. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada.